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General debate on national experience in population matters: assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Statement submitted by Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development calls attention to the importance of the girl child. It notes that gender discrimination begins at the earliest stages of life (para. 4.15) and urges Governments to take measures to combat this discrimination (para. 4.23). Yet sex-selective abortion has likely become more prevalent in the years since the Programme of Action was adopted.

Multiple techniques are now used to ascertain the sex of a child before birth. These sex-determination methods, especially ultrasound, have become much more widespread. In cultures in which sons are preferred over daughters and abortion is considered an acceptable option, the availability of prenatal sex determination leads to prenatal sex selection. Girl children in utero are killed because of their gender. Son preference can also lead to female infanticide.

Sex-selective abortion is more prevalent in some parts of the world than others. This is usually reflected in a skewed birth ratio of males to females. In some of these areas, the sex ratio has become more unbalanced since the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, suggesting that the use of sex selection in these areas has increased. Population control policies can significantly exacerbate this form of discrimination.

Sex-selective abortion and infanticide are deeply problematic. They are the killing of human beings before or shortly after birth solely on the basis of gender. They reflect an unjust cultural preference for male children over female children. And they alter the gender balance of society, resulting in very serious demographic and social problems, including the trafficking of women. Ending sex selection is necessary to ensure the equality of women and the welfare of society. Therefore, States Members of the Commission on Population and Development should take measures to reduce the bias in favour of sons and the killing of female children.

The Programme of Action indicates that the practices of prenatal sex selection and female infanticide reflect a harmful son preference (para. 4.15) and states that these forms of discrimination should be eliminated (para. 4.16 (a)). Governments should take steps to prevent sex-selective abortion and infanticide (para. 4.23). These important recommendations have been largely neglected. It is time for them to be put into action.